A Biblical Journey to Göbekli Tepe

By Matías Wiszniewer (text and photos), October 2026

I travelled to southern Turkey in February 2026, drawn by the enigma of Göbekli Tepe ("belly-hill" or "navel-hill" in Turkish), the most important archaeological discovery of recent decades. But while preparing for the journey, other mysteries presented themselves.

The base city for visiting this ancient sanctuary is called Şanlıurfa, and it is located near the Syrian border; it was previously called Urfa, and the Greeks had named it Edessa, though in the dawn of millennia it was called Urhay (it is worth noting that the morpheme "ur" in German means "origin," "proto," or "first").



Entrance to the city of Sanliurfa, in south-central Turkey

What I did not know is that certain Islamic literatures consider the famous "Ur of the Chaldeans"—mentioned in the biblical book of Genesis as the origin of Abram and his family—to be not the Sumerian "Ur," but rather this very Şanlıurfa. The argument could hold some validity not only because of the morpheme "ur" in its current and past names, but also because the city of Harran—the immediate destination of an already married Abram and his father Terah when they departed from Ur—is barely 50 kilometres south of Şanlıurfa, on the way to the lands of Canaan.

On the other hand, Harran is not a place of minor importance in the Torah (where it is spelled "Haran," meaning "way," "route," or "crossroads" in Hebrew). On the

contrary, as previously mentioned, a part of the Abramic clan goes to Harran upon leaving Ur. After Terah dies in Harran, Abram himself receives the divine command to continue the path undertaken by his father, leave that land, and go "to the place that I will show you." Much later, after countless hardships, Abram fathers Isaac, and when his time comes, Isaac returns to Harran to find a wife and returns to Canaan with that wife, Rebecca.



Ruins of the Great Umayyad Mosque in Harran

Rebecca and Isaac father twin brothers condemned to a severe rivalry. As the brothers grow up, the conflict escalates to such a point that one of them, Esau—Isaac's favourite—plots to murder his brother Jacob, Rebecca's favourite. So the mother orders Jacob to depart for Harran, to the house of Laban, Rebecca's brother.

Finally, it is in Harran—a frontier crossroads between the place we come from and the place we are going—where the famous two periods of seven years take place, during which Jacob must work for Laban to win the hand of his beloved Rachel, before departing once again from there towards the promise of a new life.

So Harran is near Şanlıurfa, which could have been—a mystery still unresolved—the biblical Ur. Furthermore, things happened and continue to happen in the center of Şanlıurfa. There is a mystical pool there inhabited by sacred and untouchable fish (which can only be observed, fed, and cared for), which also corresponds to certain Islamic literature: these are stories that tell a version of Abram's life that is not in the Bible. According to this version, besides

having been born there, the patriarch—a rebellious preacher of faith in a single God—was cast into the fire by the local tyrant of the time, and was saved by Allah, who protected his prophet by turning the fire into water and the burning coals into the fish we now see in Balıklıgöl (the pool's current name).
Nearby, in 1993, they discovered the "Urfa Man," the oldest known human statue: it dates back to the tenth millennium BC, and its nearly two-metre height makes an impact in one of the most important rooms of the city's Archaeological Museum, which also exhibits a fantastic replica of the most important enclosure of Göbekli Tepe.



“Urfa Man”, the oldest known human sculpture,
from the 10th millennium BC,
in the Sanliurfa Archaeological Museum



Balikligöl Pool in Sanliurfa



Feeding the “sacred fish” in Balikligöl

Now, from Şanlıurfa, I headed for the "navel hill," about 20 kilometers to the northeast. I had already read *Göbeklitepe: Mysteries of the Neolithic Era*, a fascinating work by Damla Tomru, a Turkish chronicler and narrator who captured her personal pilgrimage around the site. On page 58, Damla rescues the "archaeological moment" experienced by German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt when he approached the sanctuary in 1994: "Very few people in the world have ever experienced an experience of this kind," Schmidt noted. The place where those monuments were built (and later buried) by their enigmatic makers had already been explored by other archaeologists since the 1960s, but given the sophistication of what they found, it was considered "at most just another medieval cemetery," and all interest in deepening investigations was discarded... until the arrival of Klaus Schmidt.



Göbekli Tepe: modern access path to the archaeological site

The dating and subsequent revelation of Göbekli Tepe—there, in southern Turkey, near Syria, Şanlıurfa, and Harran—turned knowledge about the history of humanity upside down. It was a complex of temples populated with stone totems weighing dozens of tons, carved with a profuse and complex collection of symbols that even seemed to reveal advanced knowledge of astronomy. An impossible masterpiece for the hunter-gatherers who, according to the human sciences, populated the Earth back in 9600 BC, seven millennia before the great Egyptian pyramids. Furthermore, all the unsettling questions that arose from Schmidt's discovery were based on just the four enclosures that have been excavated so far, a mere five or ten percent of what remains to be excavated: geophysical surveys indicate that there are still about fifteen or twenty more enclosures beneath the hill.

From the complex's spacious parking lot, a minibus took me to the archaeological site itself, which is currently covered by a brilliant white fabric that reflects sunlight like a giant mirror. The moment of contemplation was memorable: I immediately understood that "archaeological moment" that dazzled its discoverer. After walking along the footbridge that surrounds the four excavated enclosures, I recalled the theses by British journalist and researcher Graham Hancock, who visited the site alongside Klaus Schmidt in 2013 (a year before the German archaeologist's sudden death).



These enclosures at Göbekli Tepe and their T-shaped totems were underground for 11,000 years until their rediscovery in 1994 (view from the surrounding walkway)

Hancock notes that if agriculture and the surplus generated by sedentary life are essential for a society to build such temples, and if such sanctuaries were built immediately before the invention of agriculture and sedentary life, the mystery of its construction becomes insurmountable. On the other hand, from his interviews with climate history specialists, Hancock derives that the timing of Göbekli Tepe's construction coincides exactly with the end of the last Ice Age (after the so-called "Younger Dryas"), when a series of catastrophes triggered scenes reminiscent of the Great Flood. Why not think—Hancock asks—that such natural disasters wiped out a very ancient and developed society, and that—with the aim of passing on the memory of the vanished civilization—the survivors took it upon themselves to spread their ancestral knowledge? Why not imagine that these survivors built the unfathomable cathedrals we observe today at Göbekli Tepe, and from them taught and transmitted the arts, sciences, and agriculture to a new humanity yet to be born? Because—Hancock argues—it cannot be that a nomadic hunter-gatherer from pre-pottery times suddenly laid aside spear, harpoons, and chisels to abruptly undertake works of such magnitude.



Fox figure, one of the most frequently carved images on the stones of Göbekli Tepe

I departed directly for Harran, which, in addition to its importance in the Torah, was already an important Assyrian trading post in the second millennium BC, and was occupied by Babylonians, Persians, Alexander the Great, Rome, and Byzantium before the Muslim conquest of the 7th century. The layers of these different eras can be seen superimposed on one another as you walk through the ruins that border the hill. And with the guidance of Yamal, a local Arab guide, I stepped through a gap in a perimeter wire fence and climbed to the top of the hill. From there I could see the Syrian border, the fields that Jacob worked for Laban, and, according to the local guide, the remains of the homes of Abram and his relatives and close associates. Was I then in the exact geographical point where the Eternal once indicated to Abram the necessity of departure? I refer, of course, to the "Lech Lecha" (go forth) of Genesis XII: that instant that never ceases to repeat itself in other fundamental moments such as the Expulsion from Paradise, Jacob's exile by order of Rebecca, Joseph's dramatic arrival in Egypt, and the Exodus led by Moses.



The local guide Yamal giving directions at the ruins of Harran

Myth, History, and Origins

For Sigmund Freud, both myths and dreams are the symbolic expression of historical or psychological truths. Just as the distorted scenes of the dream world express what is stored in the unconscious of each individual, mythical fantasies reveal, as best as they can, something of what has been repressed or forgotten in the history of civilizations.

In some of his dialogues, Plato mentions references that his Athenian predecessor Solon had gathered in Egypt regarding the existence of Atlantis—a supposedly very ancient civilization wiped out by disasters similar to those narrated in the biblical Flood and in other mythologies.

The structure of the narrative that Freud presents in *Moses and Monotheism*, regarding how his "Egyptian Moses" constitutes the Jewish people through the transmission of ancient knowledge, looks remarkably similar to what we find in other legends about the origin of different civilizations—where wise figures like Viracocha in Peru or Quetzalcoatl in Mexico arrive from unknown places to help men learn the knowledge they bring from who-knows-where.

Something happened between Canaan, Sumeria, Ur, Harran, Şanlıurfa, and Göbekli Tepe.

In the enigmatic heart of the biblical narrative—which perhaps takes from sources much older than we imagine (and whose Eternal protagonist is an unpronounceable tetragrammaton)—as well as in what remains to be discovered at the "navel-hill" and other archaeological sites, unsuspected clues might exist. The gates to a universe of revelations, capable of completely revolutionizing the

collection of beliefs that we humans hold about our own nature, may very well be waiting along the path of future archaeological and textual investigations.



The author of the chronicle next to “Abraham's House”, on the hill of Harran